

Direct Marketing Can Save You Money

The Best Ideas you'll find in this segment of The Printer's Resource from International Paper:

- The "need to knows" to help grow more direct mail business.
- How to avoid costly and embarrassing mistakes.
- Information you can use to help counsel customers on their direct mail programs.

The Changing Paradigm In Customer Relationships

Over the last two decades, rapid changes in technology, demographics of the U.S. population and economic factors have forced a change in how companies communicate with their customers and prospects. Twenty years ago, there were only three television networks and no (or very few) home computers. The majority of consumers representing the bulk of U.S. purchasing power 20 years ago have since retired and a new generation of consumers (the "Baby Boomers") have taken over.

So, what does this have to do with the average commercial printer? It means that the biggest opportunity for growing your business does not necessarily reside in your ability to print large press runs for the masses. Rather, companies today have an ever-increasing need to communicate with smaller, more defined groups (segments) of consumers with more specialized offers. And, economic accountability is the new standard by which customer communications and marketing programs are measured.

The rise of the Internet, advances in computers, and the ability to collect and manage customer information has created the opportunity for one-to-one communications with customers. The days of mass-reach advertising and "saturating the market" as a marketing strategy has greatly diminished over the last two decades. Today's companies — your customers and prospects that you're calling on to present your printing services — are demanding more targeted and efficient communications and the ability to track return on investment. It's no wonder that direct mail — whether it be for companies conducting consumer or business-to-business marketing - represents one of the fastest growth opportunities for general commercial printers today.

Literally, there have been volumes of information written on the aspects and strategy of direct marketing in the last two decades. And database marketing (the means by which customer lists and information are collected, stored and used to increase sales) has emerged as an art and a science in itself. International Paper's desire is to provide you - the printing salesperson - with some of the basic "nuts and bolts" information you need to know when working with your customers to help them conduct direct mail programs more efficiently. The information contained here is by no means everything you need to know. But, it provides a good start on the basics.

Watch Your Weight!

One of the highest costs associated with direct mail is postage. Many direct mail programs have turned disastrous as a result of poor weight planning and management. Weight is even more critical with first-class mail. Just a fraction over an ounce with First Class will nearly double the postage costs! And Standard Rate mail cannot exceed 3.3 ounces without incurring additional costs.

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The most important first step when developing a direct mail job for a customer is to mock-up the piece with actual paper samples cut to size. A slight change in paper weight or trimming is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to ensure a successful direct mailing. And, don't forget to account for inks and coatings. This can add slight (but critical) weight to a direct mailing.

Take Stock In Your Paper

The use of paper grades and stocks can (and should) be both an economical and a creative consideration when developing direct mail. Writing, text and cover grades can convey a certain feeling and attitude of importance or prestige. Opaques are often preferred for financial mailings. Colors and textures can also help add to the feeling and may improve response rates of the direct mail piece without the use of additional inks.

Keep in mind that not all offset printing stock can be successfully laser addressed or personalized. Most stocks can be ink-jetted, but some take ink or toner better than others. Your best bet is to always test blank stock on the specific laser or inkjet equipment being used to produce the mailing before printing. Check for clarity and make sure the ink or toner does not easily rub or scratch off. Some coated stock can present problems when lasering or ink-jetting. Uncoated stocks, like Accent® Opaque are safe for almost any mailing application.

Post cards, another popular form of direct mail, have their own unique set of requirements you need to be aware of. A card between 3-1/2 inches x 5 inches and 4-1/4 inches x 6 inches must mic/measure a minimum of 7 points (.007) in thickness. A card larger than 4-1/4 inches x 6 inches must mic/measure at least 9 points (.009) in thickness. Folded mailers can be on lighter-weight stock, but must mic/measure at least 9 points when folded. International Paper provides grades that are manufactured specifically to meet postal thickness requirements.

Finally, use white or light colored stock to help eliminate additional costly surprises. There must be sufficient contrast between the stock and the address copy for the Optical Character Reader (OCR) equipment to read accurately. If a piece can not be read by the OCR equipment, the post office will require a manual sorting process which can add significant cost. Printing a background color on a light stock and knocking out the required address area is a way to give a piece more interest while still meeting postal regulations.

Your Class May Entitle You For Discounts

The United States Postal Service (USPS) has strict guidelines for mail pieces, particularly for those intending to take advantage of postal discounts. There is more latitude for First-Class Basic Rate (no discounts), but for direct mailings targeting larger audiences, there are specific guidelines required to be followed.

First-Class and Standard-Class (formerly known as Bulk Rate) are the mail classes most commonly used for direct mail. Both have a number of discount categories available from three-digit and five-digit presort through many automation discounts. The more "saturated" your mailing, or.. .the further it can be sorted down from five or three-digit zip codes all the way to carrier route.. .the greater the postage discount. Automation discounts are based on carrier route sorting and pre-bar coding. You should take advantage of the USPS resources to determine whether an applicable discount exists. The USPS can provide detailed charts outlining the many discount categories and the current postal rates for each category. Extensive postal information is also available on the USPS Web site: www.usps.com

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More “Need-To-Know” Information

1. All mail pieces must fall within the required Aspect Ratio (length divided by width must be between 1.3 and 2.5). Anything outside of these parameters is subject to an up-charge. Besides being sufficiently rectangular, a mail piece must have properly folded and/or sealed edges to pass through the post office's high-speed reading and sorting equipment. A folded self-mailer may require tab closures (wafer seals) or a gum-sealed edge.
2. There can be no extraneous copy or art below the delivery address. If the OCR equipment cannot read the address or gets confused by other elements within the OCR read area, the mailing may be automatically disqualified. There are some exceptions for first-class and pre-sorted mailings. Check with Postal Requirements or the postal design analyst at your area's main post office and provide a mock-up for their approval.
3. Beware of “float” in a window envelope. The post office conducts a “tap test” to ensure the address is visible through the window at all times. Make an accurate mock-up of your letter or insert and conduct your own “tap test” to be safe.
4. Business Reply Cards (BRC) and Business Reply Envelopes (BRE) using a permit must conform to very strict guidelines. The envelope must be white (or a very light color) and the ink must be black (or a very dark color.) There is specific art for the Business Reply Mail address header, the FIM code and indicia available from your area's main post office.
5. Stamps vs. indicia. An indicia is a block printed in the upper right hand corner of a card or letter that identifies postal class and the permit holder's number. Postage is deducted from the permit holder's account by the USPS. An indicia can save money because it is printed directly on to the envelope. Stamps are available for several bulk mail categories. Applying stamps can be more costly than an indicia, but can give a mail piece a personalized, more important look and feel.

Some “Best Ideas” You Can Start Doing Today

Nothing is more frustrating, not to mention costly, than to complete the printing on a direct mail project, take it to the post office and find that it fails to meet certain specifications and will cost more than anticipated. Or, worse yet, to find that the whole mailing will be refused.

Here are some things you can do to help your customers conduct more successful and efficient direct mail programs:

1. Always, always, always... check with the post office. Rules and regulations effecting direct mail do change. You can access the USPS through their Web site (www.usps.com) for up-to-date information. But, it should be standard operating procedure to provide the USPS with a mock-up before running the presses.
2. Don't “advertise by mail.” The common temptation is to try to include everything in one mailing. Remember, the purpose of direct mail is to entice a response for more information. Counsel your customers on the fact that less is often more in direct mail. The easier it is for the recipient to get to the offer and the method for responding, the better. Plus, “advertising by mail” simply serves to create more weight and more postage costs.

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3. Mailing lists can make all the difference. More and more, general commercial printers are adding capabilities for list and database housing to assist their customers with direct mail programs. Lists must be clean, accurate and pertinent to ensure response and to avoid wasting marketing dollars. Your ability as a commercial printing salesperson to know the basics about mailing lists will help add value to your customer relationships. More to come on mailing list basics from International Paper in future segments of The Printer's Resource.

We Hope We've Helped.

The Printer's Resource from International Paper is designed to provide printing salespeople and their customers with valuable information they can use every day. International Paper cannot guarantee results here, but we believe these tips will help save you time and money. For your future reference, sales tips from The Printer's Resource are archived in a special section on our Web site at www.IPpaper.com/printer__modules.html.

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